FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: MARY WADE TRIPLETT, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
MONONGALIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
TELEPHONE: 304-598-5152  marywaude.triplett@wv.gov

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH

MORGANTOWN, WV—SEPTEMBER 19, 2017

You probably know to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before preparing food and to keep raw meat away from fruits and vegetables.

But did you know that you should wash all raw fruits and vegetables before slicing into them, but never meat, poultry or eggs? Or what temperature each type of meat should be cooked to be consumed safely?

September is National Food Safety Education Month, which is a good time to review proper storage, washing and cooking techniques. Also, the Monongalia County Health Department offers Food Safety classes that are not only mandated for restaurant and grocery store employees and food delivery truck drivers but are also encouraged for people who participate in community cooking fundraisers, bake sales and other food-oriented events.

Safe food habits actually begin in the grocery store. When bagging items, do not put raw animal products, even when packaged, in the same bag as fruits and vegetables. And when you get home, also make sure to separate these items in the refrigerator. The refrigerator should be kept at a temperature of 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

When preparing food, use a different cutting board for fruits and vegetables than you do for meat. Firm fruits and vegetables can be washed under water with a scrub brush; others should be thoroughly rinsed off. Also, you should wash cutting boards, countertops and utensils with hot, soapy water before and after preparing food. Do not use the same knife to cut raw meat and then fruits and vegetables, and wash your hands well after handling any raw animal food.

Failing to follow proper washing, cooking, thawing and storing procedures can contribute to food-borne illnesses. The five most common germs that cause food-borne illnesses are norovirus, salmonella, Clostridium perfringens, Campylobacter and Staphylococcus, or Staph. Other germs do not cause as many illnesses, but when they do strike, the illness is more likely to lead to hospitalization. Those germs are Clostridium botulinum, which causes botulism; Listeria; Escherichia coli, or E. coli; and Vibrio.
Common symptoms of food-borne illnesses are nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Anyone can get sick, but there are certain groups of people who are more susceptible to food-borne illnesses. These include young children, older adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.

If you suspect you have gotten ill from eating food from a particular restaurant or store, report it to the Monongalia County Health Department. If the health department receives at least two complaints about the same business, it will be investigated. Most people with a food-borne illness get better without medical treatment, but people with severe symptoms should see a doctor. One common complication can be dehydration.

Restaurant workers have options in the food safety classes they take through the Monongalia County Health Department. They can attend a class in person at the health department for $10. Also, for the third year now, general food workers can access the courses online for $20. After the first year, these certifications can be renewed for one, two or three years. Person-in-Charge (PIC) classes are now available online for $50. At least one manager per establishment must take a 12-hour class in person over two days, with an hour-long test afterward. Those taking the classes learn the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Code adopted by West Virginia.

To learn more about food safety, check out foodsafety.gov, with tips and helpful videos from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). If you are interested in taking Food Safety classes through the Monongalia County Health Department, check out monchd.org and click on the “Environmental” tab, or call 304-598-6702.